

September 15, 1944

HOME ORCHARDS IN LIBERTY COMMUNITY OUACHITA PARISH, LOUISIANA/1

By
Mary Louise Collings/2

LIBERTY COMMUNITY, 13 miles west of the city of Monroe, Ouachita Parish, is in the hill section of Northeast Louisiana.

The People: The nationality of the people is American with most of the white people of Anglo Saxon extraction. There are only two races, white and Negro. The whites outnumber the Negroes six to one. Most of the Negroes are tenants. Here, as in all other areas of the south, there is segregation of the two races, but each has opportunities for education and improvement, and both are included in the extension program.

About 90 percent of the people are engaged in farming. The other 10 percent work in the nearby towns or for the paper mill, either in the woods cutting pulpwood or at the mill itself.

Farming is the most respected occupation in this community.

There are no distinct social lines drawn in the community except pertaining to the two races. Family and religious affiliation have the greatest influence. There are established families dating back at least four generations. The community maintains and supports a large country church and carries on many varied church activities at all times. Land ownership and wealth have very little effect on the social life of the community.

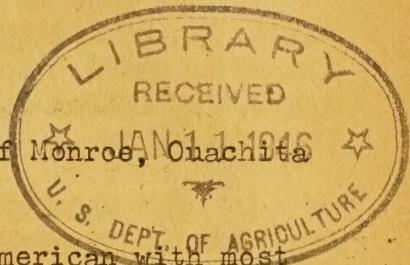
There is great pride in the community. The strength of the community lies in the friendship and loyalty the families show to each other. They respond to any evidence of need or distress, whether in work to be done or in illness.

The people of this community, both white and colored, have access to good high schools. At least 60 percent of the children are now graduating from high school.

They take a keen interest in local and parish government and in their officials.

/1 One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the Conference To Outline the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-torn Countries, held in Washington, D.C., September 19 to 22, 1944. Extension Service and Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations cooperating.

/2 Extension Home Economist, Division of Field Studies and Training.



The preservation of a satisfying family life, a measure of economic security, and conveniences to maintain a satisfactory standard of living, are values which the people seem to want out of life.

As this is a strictly rural community, the various church organizations, the home demonstration club, and 4-H Club are the chief organized groups in which the people participate. The Negroes have their Self-Help League (sponsored by extension agents) for adults and 4-H Clubs for their boys and girls.

The pattern of life in this community has changed considerably in the last twenty years. The people are making good use of modern methods and up-to-date information both in farming and in homemaking that has been made available through the Agricultural Extension Service and through the sub-experiment station located within three miles of the community. Much of the drudgery has been taken out of their work.

Radios are in most of the homes, and have a great and broadening influence on the thinking of the people.

It is difficult to say which group is most affected by these changes. The landowners in most instances own small farms of only 60 to 80 acres, so they do not have much more money to put in conveniences than do their neighbors who are tenants. However, on the whole, the landowners are unusually the first to adopt practices and to add conveniences.

In doing extension work in this community one must bear in mind that although community conflicts are few, yet certain family differences exist. Care must be taken in the choice of leaders. There are some in the community who aspire to be leaders but who lack the ability to cooperate with all classes of people. This situation needs careful handling. There is another small element that causes conflict in the thinking of the people and creates a situation that must be handled with much tact and diplomacy.

The Problem: In 1934, the Extension home garden specialist with the help of the home demonstration agents and the local leaders made a study of a cross-section of farm gardens in Louisiana. Besides revealing the inadequacy of the gardens, the study showed an appalling lack of orchards and small fruits.

By checking the food habits and the diets of the people it was evident that those who did not grow fruit, as a rule, did without. Southern low-income farm people are past master in doing without. The average income is so small that cash is not available for the necessary fruit for an adequate diet.

Tenancy and the one-crop system of farming were thought to be only partly to blame for the situation. A lack of information on the value of fruit in the diet, on suitable varieties, and on insect-and-disease control were considered to be important factors.

The situation in Ouachita Parish was a duplicate in miniature of the State-wide inadequacy. The Extension agent decided to present the situation to rural leaders in her parish to see if they would do something about it.

What Happened When the Leaders Saw the Need for Orchards:

In the Fall of 1935 Ouachita home demonstration clubwomen met the Extension home garden specialist to discuss an orchard project for this parish. These leaders worked out the fruit requirements for a family according to nutrition needs. They were asked to find the cost of supplying this fruit to the family buying from the markets. They were then asked to make a survey of the fruit trees and small fruits in their communities and to report back a month later.

The leaders worked hard on both assignments. They were surprised to find that to supply the average family with fruit from the market would take the money from 4 bales of cotton, and that the parish had about one-tenth of the required trees.

By doing this in advance, the leaders felt the need of this project as a major one in the home demonstration program for the year. The specialist planned leader-training meetings to be held in the morning one day a month for 4 months. Then in the afternoon of the same day a tour was made of the result demonstrations. In this way the leaders could see how the demonstrator had carried out in her orchard the Extension recommendations. They asked for one demonstration orchard in each home demonstration club and urged each club member to plant one fruit or nut tree, if not more.

The leaders from liberty Community attended leader-training meetings. They were impressed with the inadequacy of fruit in their diets. At each club meeting they would check with members to see if they had planted a tree. The tenants were asked to plant two or three fruit trees even though they knew they were not going to stay on their farm very long. Home owners who grew figs offered to give them all the cuttings they wanted. It was suggested that a seedling peach tree was better than no peach, and if tenants did not see where they could buy a tree, they could get seedlings. Plums and youngberries were given those who would plant them. This plan was begun in the hope that tenants moving from one home to another would leave fruit trees for the next tenant, and likewise find fruit trees where they moved.

Mrs. Huenfeld, one of the demonstrators, told the leaders about an old Negro woman living on her hill plantation. She had lived with her for 15 years and had moved into 3 different houses; but she had a desire to plant peach and fig trees. And, now, at each of those tenant houses there are bearing trees which were set out by this old Negro woman who wanted to plant and own something even though she knew she would eventually move.

The leaders were given wholesale lists of fruit trees and they secured the orders for the trees. Liberty Community secured 3 good demonstrators, and each agreed to plant six apple trees, 14 peach, 4 fig, 4 plub, 4 persimmon, 4 pear, 200 strawberry plants, 20 youngberry plants, 10 blackberry plants and 4 grape vines. (This number and variety of trees will give a family of five all the fruit they need for family use during a year.) The demonstrators agreed to teach others in their community what they learned about orchard culture.

Four tours were made during the orchard-training meetings. One visit was made to North Louisiana Experiment Station just three miles away from the center of Liberty. The Experiment Station Orchard was ready for the winter. The women saw how to treat for the borer, how to plant a cover crop, and how to prune. They also made a visit to Arthur Lowery's orchard. Mr. Lowery completed his orchard to meet the requirements as outlined by the specialist. He had two trees that had 12 and 15 bushels of peaches that he sold for \$1 a bushel at the farm. A tour was made to a pecan orchard where 26,000 lbs. had been gathered in one day.

This being a new project for this parish, the newspapers were glad to feature it. They carried 22 different articles about the program, variety of trees to plant, care, what to spray, and when, best cover crops, and individual feature stories.

Achievement days were held in the Liberty Club at the conclusion of the first series of leader-training meetings. The entire family from a majority of houses was out to hear the results accomplished. The club served a supper at the Achievement Day; the leaders saw that it included some fruit the women had bought but could have raised at home. They were told that an orchard as outlined by the Extension Department could be planted for \$21; that insects and disease could be controlled for \$5.40 a year. This community Achievement Day seemed to impress the men with the value of what the women were trying to do.

A parish Achievement Day was held in June with the Monroe and West Monroe Kiwanis Clubs and guests. Reports were given by the leaders. Again fruits were served that should have been grown at home.

The first prize home demonstration booth at the Ouachita Valley Fair was on insect-and-disease control in the orchard. A card calling attention to the date of putting out P.D.B. for peach-tree borer held the attention of all fruit-tree owners.

Interest in orchard work was so satisfactory that the leaders decided to include it in their program for 1936-1937. Liberty Community had a club meeting on orchards again this year. Leaders enrolled demonstrators and cooperators (those who agreed to plant at least one tree), made home visits, distributed bulletins to non-members, assisted with field-day meetings, prepared exhibits for achievement day, and collected reports from club members.

The specialist procured price lists on cooperative purchases of large numbers of trees from reliable nurseries. All these lists were submitted to a committee of home demonstration club women who decided where they wished to order trees. The leaders then made up the orders, collected the money, and distributed the trees. The women bought June-bud peach trees for 8 and 9¢ each, equally as good as fruit-tree salesmen delivered to their neighbors for 75 and 85 cents each. This meant a real savings and enabled many to get trees who otherwise could not have afforded them.

Several meetings were held the second year of the project at the Calhoun Experiment Station, where the horticulturist in charge of the experimental work with fruits was very helpful in affording an opportunity to study work being done at the station. One meeting was in the winter to observe pruning, spraying, and cultural practices; others were in the summer when fruit was ripe, that results might be observed. In addition, several other field meetings were held in home and commercial orchards. The entomologist of the L.S.U. Experiment Station attended most of these meetings and his experience in the fruit areas of other States was most helpful.

The Liberty farm people attended these meetings in good numbers because they were near. Then, too, they had land similar to that of the Experiment Station and they said that if Superintendent Stewart would grow orchard fruits they could, too.

The three Liberty demonstrators were very conscientious about following all recommended practices. They pruned, sprayed, fertilized, planted cover crops, and encouraged others to follow suit.

As interest spread to new farms, there could be no lessening of effort in already-established orchards, and the home demonstration agent continued follow-up work here, realizing that an orchard which is not cared for will prove a failure.

While Liberty Club had fewer meetings on orchards after the first year, it depended on leaders, monthly garden letters, newspaper publicity, circular letters, and personal contacts to keep the people informed on seasonal orchard topics. Emphasis was placed on the cultivation and care of the trees and the control of insects and diseases.

In 1942, the production of more fruit for home use was tied in closely with the garden work as a necessary part of the Food For Freedom Program. The importance of adding small fruits that will produce quickly, the addition of more fruit trees, the propagation of pears, grapes, and figs from cuttings, and better care of fruit trees on hand was stressed that year. Cooperative orders were continued, and the agent reported larger orders and more families taking advantage of this service.

Evaluation of Results: The orchard program has been carried on in Liberty Community for about ten years with the result that about one-third of all the families in the community, both white and colored, have adopted some or all of the orchard practices recommended.

In this community there are more home orchards planted around the pattern set up by the Extension Service than in any other community in this area. Liberty Community's three demonstrators have kept up their orchards.

In planning the project, there was an attempt made to obtain response from tenant families as well as owners, from Negro families as well as white, from non-club members as well as from participants in Extension activities. The data are too limited to determine just how effective this attempt was. We do know that white club members worked to interest some individual negro families and instruct them; and when groups were invited on tours to the experiment stations, the Negro families had tours, too.

There seems to have been some success at least on demonstration farms in changing the normal patterns of short work-season as is customary on the cotton farm and extending work days into winter months, i.e., for spraying and pruning of fruit trees.

There were some obstacles which stood in the way of greater success.

(1) The plan of work. The original plan was started as a home demonstration project, and not as a cooperative project for the whole family. Until the wife could secure the interest of the husband and get his cooperation, the amount she could accomplish was limited.

The home demonstration staff almost exclusively planned and conducted the program. The Experiment Station entomologist and horticulturists gave a good deal of assistance, but in only rare instances was the county agent brought into the program. There was little attempt to make it a project for which the two agents shared responsibility.

(2) Lack of spray equipment has been another limiting factor. Not many farms had spray equipment used on other crops and suitable for orchard use. Insecticides seem to be costly things to most farm families. They bought them only when prompted by dire need.

(3) The nature of the project made progress slow. It takes a long time for fruit trees to begin bearing. Orchards require care in and out of producing season and these cotton farmers were used to a short work season. Farm people did not have specific information on how to care for trees. They had to be taught. There is quite a bit of expense for equipment, fertilizer, and some for trees. The trees, alone, bought cooperatively, cost around \$10 if recommended plan was followed.

(4) The reactions of farm people were not immediately enthusiastic. A cash crop to most Liberty farm families seemed very much more important than the home food supply. Fruit does not "stick to your ribs" and so it seemed, to those without a knowledge of nutrition, to be unimportant in the diet. There were some individuals who felt that budded and grafted fruit trees would not live like the trees their grandfathers had, and therefore opposed any orchard development in their community, using as an argument that trees too highly cultivated will not stand neglect and abuse.

There were certain factors which contributed to the success of the growing of orchard fruits in Liberty Community:

(1) Factors already established played their part. The local leader system was in existence and was used effectively. The families in home demonstration club work were disposed to follow the direction of the leaders. The families had confidence in the home demonstration agent.

The information and training given the leaders by the Extension Service and the horticulturist at the Experiment Station, and the information disseminated through demonstrations at field meetings had a great influence.

The families in the clubs who had studied nutrition felt a need for more fruit in the diet. They liked fruit. A better knowledge of nutrition created a desire for a more adequate supply of fruit, that their families might be better nourished.

Some families desired to outstrip their neighbors in carrying out new and improved practices. This is a progressive community and it is a distinction to be one who is "modern" and try out new ideas.

(2) The techniques necessary for successful orchards were not entirely new to families. The families knew something about planting, fertilizing, and cultivating shrubs and trees.

(3) Extension Methods Used: A wide variety of methods was used-- method demonstrations, monthly circular letters, planting plans, bulletins, publicity, visits, result demonstrations, and tours. The families were stimulated to action by club goals, progress reports, field and achievement days, and free cuttings. The end-product of good fresh and canned fruit to eat at all seasons was held before them each year -- saving through growing rather than buying. Timely information was given year after year with regular follow-up stimulation. Cooperative orders at reasonable prices made purchasing of trees and insecticides easier. Spray equipment was made available in some instances.

Changes the Practice Introduced Into the Lives of the People: This project in Liberty Community has brought about better nutrition through a wider use of fresh, canned, and dried fruits in the family diet. This was the primary objective in the project.

There has been some surplus fruit produced which has found its way to market and this additional cash has made possible the purchase of more trees, spray materials, and equipment. It has also encouraged a few people to start small commercial orchards, which provide another source of income.

